

Never Walk Alone

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Author's note: Later on in the story, if you have trouble reading what one of the characters is saying, just sound it out and you'll figure it out ;)

Never Walk Alone

The day was warm, and not a cloud could be seen in the red and gold sky of the Andalite Homeworld. It was a busy day. People bustling around. Children playing and laughing. Young _arisths_ practicing their morphing powers.

Just an average day.

Everyone was playing and having a good time, or going about their business.

All but two Andalites. They were off by themselves talking quietly to each other.

One was male, and his name was Meril-Neskar-Divinis.

Meril was mentally handicapped, and had a mind like a small child or a toddler.

The cause of his mental handicap was a rare disease called _Yolla_, which caused a gradual deterioration of the Andalite brain. The affected person would slowly regress back to an infant-like state and eventually die. Often times it would cause seizures. There was no cure.

The other Andalite was female, and her name was Trelina-Ilistrin-Zion.

Trelina was kneeling down in a metallic hoverchair, because she couldn't walk.

The cause of her inability to walk was a birth defect; she only had one heart, and it was too small. There was no operation for her defect, and that one heart she had would eventually fail. It left her weak and pale all the time.

Both Meril and Trelina were handicapped. And both of them were going to die.

They had been friends all their lives, and took care of each other. If one wasn't feeling well, the other would stay up all night watching. When one was afraid the other would comfort them.

Alone, they were different. But together, they were pretty normal.

Meril cooed as he poked at a small flower growing by the root of a _Therant_ tree. Pretty!

Yes it's very pretty. Trelina smiled, watching her friend. She inched her chair closer and added, let's go find a bunch and make a boquet. Then we can put it up in our room.

OK! Meril squealed and started picking all the flowers he could find and handing them to Trelina, who tied them all together with piece of vine.

Trelina then took the last flower and tucked it behind her ear. There, that's enough. Now help me get some water for them. Otherwise they'll wither up and die.

Just like us will sometime. Meril said casually.

He was right, in a way. They were both slowly withering away.

Yesâ€¦like us.. Trelina sighed. She hated thinking about dying.

It hung over her like an annoying dark cloud that wouldn't go away.

Meril scurried ahead towards the larg scoop where his and Trelina's caretakers lived.

Lookies what Trelina and I finded! He blurted when he ran into Callepec-Thallis-Rellisap

Callepec loved Meril and Trelina like her own children. To her they were the sweetest pair.

Oh they are lovely, Meril. I'll get a container for them alright? she smiled.

He nodded eagerly, and his eyestalks bobbed up and down.

Trelina scooted inside and smiled, having heard Meril all the way outside.

A large, muscular male Andalite came up beside her. His name was Domnin-Inisthirin-Terrapouth.

Hello Trelina. Domnin said with a smile. I see you found more flowers to entertain Meril with.

Trelina smiled. He loves flowers. Almost as much as he loves music.

Hello Domnin. Lookies! Meril came around the corner holding out the metal container that held the flowers. It was still wet from being dipped to collect the water.

My, my, they are pretty. Domnin smiled, and Meril showed a crooked smile with his stalk eyes.

Come on Meril. Let's go put them in our sleeping area. Trelina turned her chair and started scooting off to another part of the oversized scoop, and Meril scurried off behind her.

Callepec turned to Domnin and said, Trelina looks a bit pale. Should we give her an oxygen treatment?

Let's see how she does right now. If she faints we'll go ahead with it.

Alright.

AAAH!! Callepec! Domnin! Meril's seizing! Trelina's cry came from the other end of the scoop.

That's the third one today. Domnin said as he hurried to Trelina and Meril. Callepec followed close behind.

Meril was on the ground, jerking from violent convulsions. His eyes rolled wildly. Mucus oozed from his nostrils and his breath came in ragged gasps.

Domnin used his tail to pin Meril's down so it wouldn't whip about. Callepec cradled his head gently so he wouldn't bang it. Trelina watched, horrified.

No matter how many of these she saw, it scared her.

Slowly, Meril's convulsions subsided and he lay still, breathing slowly. The seizure had been so violent that he had expelled the grass he'd eaten earlier, and his hooves were a slimy mess because of it.

Callepec took his pulse while Domnin prepared to help lift him and carry him to the lake to be cleaned up.

He's OK to move now. she said, and helped Domnin lift Meril.

Together they carried him to the lake and cleaned him off.

Is he OK? Trelina asked.

Yes. He's still with us. Callepec answered gently. But that was a bad one. Eighteen minutes.

Trelina sighed and looked down at her hands. Her delicate little fingertips were turning pale because of lack of oxygen.

Callepec left Domnin to tend to Meril and went over to Trelina. Let's give you a treatment and let them alone.

OK.

It was just after sunset.

Meril was still unconscious, laying on a mattress under one of the awnings that kept the rain off. Trelina lay on the opposite end of the scoop, an oxygen mask strapped to her face.

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—We're withering away, like old flowers,— she thought.

Trelina couldn't stand it anymore. She unstrapped the oxygen and scooted in her chair to Meril's bedside. She had something in her hand, a little present she had meant to give to Meril in the morning.

Meril's stalk eyes opened slowly. His tiny main eyes opened a moment later when Trelina said his name.

I 'fraid of dying. He mumbled.

I know. We all are. But think, once we do—we won't be sick anymore. Trelina said back.

Meril's thoughtspeak grew very quiet. What we do when I dies. You be lonely. I be lost on the way to the Other Side—he trailed off.

Trelina placed her hand on Meril's and he looked at her. She spoke quietly to him, making a very private promise. Meril nodded slowly in response.

Then she reached down into her chair and produced the present she had for him.

It was a small gold music box. When opened, it would play a song. While the song played, an artificial flower would bloom over and over again.

Music! Meril cooed happily. It so pretty! Thanks you Trelina!

Trelina smiled. You're welcome. Now, whenever you're sad or afraid, just play this music box. And for a minute or two everything will be OK. she handed it to him.

Meril couldn't stop smiling, and his eyes had a gleam in them like a small child looking at a favorite toy.

Trelina put her head down next to his and fell asleep there. Meril fell asleep soon after. Domnin came along about an hour later and took Trelina to her bed.

Six months passed by.

Meril was much more feeble-minded. He could barely speak correctly.

And Trelina was much paler. She got tired much faster than before.

They were getting sicker, obviously.

One night, Trelina snuck across the scoop to Meril's bed.

Meril. Wake up Meril. She urged.

I uhwayeek. Meril said.

I'm tired of being cooped up. We need an adventure. Let's sneak out to the spaceport and watch some launches.

Anfensher? Ohkee. I comes wif yuh. He slowly got up out of bed.

Trelina draped a blanket over herself to hide how gaunt she was, and also to hide the hoverchair. She led the way and Meril followed close behind.

They arrived at the spaceport and explored around as much as they could without being seen. They got right up next to the hull of the domeship ShadowBlitz.

Then Trelina noticed the open hatch. She smiled.

Wut yuh sees? Meril asked.

Look. We can sneak in. Want to?

Ohkee.

Trelina glanced around, then scooted her chair towards the hatch. She was about to usher Meril inside whenâ€

Hey! You there! What do you think you're doing?

Busted.

The captain came out of the shadows and stood over them. It was obvious that he was the captain; there was a huge badge on the bandolier he wore. And because he looked fierce and powerful compared to the two sick children.

W-we juss wookeeng awound. Meril stammered.

The captain gave him a strange look. Are you stupid or something?

Hey that was rude! Trelina burst out.

I didn't ask you. The captain snapped.

He has _Yolla_. she continued.

Yesss I has _Yowa_. Meril echoed.

The captain's face didn't change. Hm. Just not used to cripples and retardsâ€|er..ahemâ€|Anywayâ€|what are you doing here?

Nothing. Looking around is all. Trelina commented innocently.

The captain sighed and walked off, muttering.

Trelina watched him carefully, and as soon as he was out of view, she started into the hatch again. Let's go!

Meril's small main eyes were gleaming with excitement. He'd always wanted to see inside a domeship, and he quickly followed her in.

Together, they managed to sneak onto the empty bridge to look around.

I thuh kuhpteen! Meril said as he got to the place where the Captain stood during a battle. He started making battle noises.

Trelina sat back and giggled at him while she explored the weapons station.

Battuh stassins! W-we gots Yeeyuks! Meril was saying.

For several minutes, he carried on with his yelling and squealing. Trelina enjoyed watching and played along for a short time.

Suddenlyâ€|

Hey! Crazy kids! Get your hindquarters OFF MY SHIP!!!! The captain roared, having come onto the bridge to do a system check.

Meril shrieked and dashed out of the bridge as fast as he could go. Trelina was not far behind. The captain chased after them.

That way! Trelina pointed to the left, and then turned, vanishing into shadows. She spied a piece of wire that was just out of her reach.

Meril scrambled around the corner behind her and peeked out with his stalk eyes. The captain galloped up and stood there, but didn't see them yet.

Sayeef? He asked privately.

Not yetâ€| Trelina said privately and pointed to the wire, chuckling. Meril, when I say so, pull that wire.

The captain started to step into the shadows. Any second now, he would see them.

Meril grasped the wire in his hands. He waited for Trelina's order to pull, and watched the captain take another step forward. His torso leaned forward as he peered into the shadows.

Privately, Trelina yelled, PULL!!!

Meril pulled the wire as hard as he could, and from a port just behind and to the side of him, the ship's sewage sprayed out.

All over the captain. His eyes went wide, then squeezed shut as he got covered in the ship's wastes.

ARRRRGH!!!!!! BLASTED KIDS!!!! YUCK!!!!!! The captain was too busy wiping his face and cursing to see Meril and Trelina burst out of the shadows.

That's what you get for making fun of me and my friend! Trelina taunted him as she knocked him over by ramming into his hindquarters with her hoverchair.

Meril ran back and gave the wire one more pull, covering the captain in a fresh coat of sewage, laughing wildly. Kuhpteen Poopie!

That's right. Trelina agreed with a satisfied smile on her stalk eyes. He should feel right at home in the poop. It's much like his personality!

AARGH!!! The captain yelled as he slipped and fell face first back on the ground.

Together, Trelina and Meril hurried off into the darkest part of the port before the Captain could finish wiping his face and getting up.

Cursing angrily, with a stench settling over him and covered in the ship's sewage, the captain stood up and hurried off. He slipped, fell and got up again. Laughter of fellow officers followed him from a distance.

Trelina and Meril skidded to a halt together, laughing wildly. They watched as the humiliated captain stumbled along the ramp and into the ship.

Hah! Tayeek dat! Meril swung his tail wildly.

My, myâ€|what a warrior you are! The captain Poopinater! Trelina giggled.

I waweeyuh! I Poopinater! he squealed and laughed.

Shoot! We better get back before we're missed! Hurry! Trelina noticed the time.

Oy! Meril shouted and ran ahead.

Callepec and Domnin paced around.

Where in _yaolin_ are they? Domnin asked.

Callepec shook her head. They could have gone on a walk. You know how they like to wander.

Let's hope they get back soon. Meril could have a seizure, or Trelina could faint. Then what could happen?

I'm sure they're fine. As Callepec spoke, Trelina and Meril appeared near the trees.

WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?! Domnin almost roared.

We got bored and took a walk Trelina lied calmly.

In the middle of the night? And what's that smell? Callepec asked skeptically.

W-we wooked at thuh pwetty staws. Meril pointed at the sky, then giggled. Gas.

Callepec and Domnin bought it. They never found out that Meril and Trelina had snuck to the spaceport and "poopinated" the captain. That was the best secret that Meril and Trelina had together.

Well get some sleep you two. Domnin said, now calm again.

May I sit up with Meril until he falls asleep? Just so he won't get scared. Trelina asked.

OK. But you go to bed as soon as he's asleep. Understood? Callepec stated.

Yes, Callepec. Understood.

Meril was already obediently climbing onto his mattress where he slept. He fidgeted around until Trelina came to his side.

She talked in private thoughtspeak to Meril. That was fun wasn't it?

Wots uhf fun! Meril cooed back in private thoughtspeak. Already, he was almost asleep, talking with his eyes closed.

I'm glad you had so much fun being a warrior, a captain and a captain poopinator. She giggled.

I gwad tuh. He giggled back.

Trelina smiled and put her hand down on his. She thought he was asleep and started to turn her chair to go to her own bed.

Tweweenuh?

She turned her stalk eyes back, then her face. Yes, Meril?

I wuvs yuhâ€| Meril murmured with a small smile. Those were the last rational words he would ever say.

And he was asleep before she could respond.

Trelina turned her chair back to Meril and brushed her palm across his cheek. I love you too Meril.

She smiled at his sleeping face, then turned and scooted to her bed.

Meril was having a nasty seizure when Trelina awoke.

When it was over, his whole bed and the blankets had to be changed because he'd soiled them all the way through.

Meril? Are you OK? Trelina hurried over as fast as her chair would allow.

Uhbawuhâ€|.nuhmewayuhâ€| Meril mumbled, making sounds like those a baby would.

Trelina wanted to cry. She knew that his time was almost up.

Shhh, I'm here, Meril.

Meril quieted down and looked at her with frightened eyes. His uncoordinated fingers tried to grasp her hand. He couldn't.

Trelina took Meril's hand and nuzzled her cheek against it.

Nehmehwaeeee he mumbled again, knowing he couldn't be understood. He was barely aware of his surroundings anymore.

She hugged him the best she could.

At that moment, Domnin and Callepec returned with clean bedding and gently placed Meril back into bed.

Trelina stayed with him until Callepec pulled he aside.

What is it? she asked.

It's only a matter of days, Trelina. He doesn't have long.

What about me? How long do I have? Trelina asked.

Your heart is weak- Callepec started.

JUST TELL ME!

She sighed. A few days, maybe.

Trelina took in a shakey breath. Maybeâ€|maybe two days?

Callepec nodded silently.

Domnin finished up with Meril and touched Trelina's shoulder. Then he trotted across the scoop to graze. Callepec followed, leaving Trelina to herself with Meril.

Meril was fidgeting, trying to wind up his music box.

Hereâ€|I'll get it. Trelina whispered, winding it up for him.

Meril cooed and drew his balled up fists close to his body the way an infant would. Heeeeâ€|

As the day wore on, Meril got more and more still and quiet. Eventually all he did was lie there and stare.

Trelina wasn't doing so well herself. She was very short of breath all day, and often had to stop and put on her oxygen mask just to breathe properly.

In the evening, Trelina sat with Meril as he fell asleep. She was telling him silly stories that had him giggling and cooing for hours.

I love you Meril. She told him as his eyes fluttered closed.

Humumumuhhhhâ€|â€| Meril mumbled faintly, trying to answer her.

Trelina stayed at Meril's side as he slipped into his final coma. He would never be conscious again.

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Good. Maybe he won't know it's happening then. Trelina thought as she held his hand.

The next morning, Callepec went to Trelina to check on her.

Trelina was frighteningly pale, and her fingers were white from her poor oxygen levels. Callepec turned on the oxygen mask and put it on Trelina's face.

I'm OKâ€|â€| Trelina moaned as she awoke.

I knowâ€| Callepec played along. Just breathe in deeply and you'll feel better.

OKâ€|

Domnin tended to Meril, turning him when necessary or giving him nourishment.

Meril didn't show any response as he was turned. Not a twitch of an eyelid. No little coo to show he knew someone was there.

Nothing.

But he was alive. Breathing.

As the day wore on, Meril's breathing grew softer and weaker. Trelina stayed beside him.

I'm here, Meril. I'm right here next to you. I haven't forgotten our promiseâ€| she nuzzled her cheek against his hand and stroked his cheek with her palm. I still plan on keeping it.

Meril didn't answer, except for the sound of his soft breathing. His face looked so peaceful and innocent.

Trelina noticed that the new flowers that were brought in had all withered away. All but two white ones with petals that bloomed in a concentric pattern. Those two flowers stood strong.

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Those two are us—we are the strong ones. Our souls are not sick. Just our bodies. Trelina told herself.

The next evening, Trelina overheard Domnin and Callepec talking.

Meril's not doing too good, Callepec. I don't think he'll survive the night.

Callepec sighed. At least he's not suffering—what about Trelina?

She might hold on for a few days more. But not more than a day. Domnin replied calmly and evenly.

Trelina stopped listening. She was too tired.

She fell asleep.

Domnin watched over Meril, who was starting to breathe more unevenly and noisily. His chest heaved and his nostrils flared with each strained gasp.

Let go, child. Be free of the pain. Domnin whispered.

Death isn't the end. It's a beginning. Don't fear it. Callepec whispered.

They nodded to each other, then went to bed for the night. They knew that they would find Meril dead in the morning, but they wanted him to go in peace without two people crying over him.

Trelina awoke hours later. Her sleep had been unusually dreamless.

She could hear Meril's labored breathing from across the scoop. And she remembered her promise.

Trelina knew her heart was going to give out on her anytime now. And she didn't want to go down a cripple. So slowly, she pulled herself to her four hooves and stood on her wobbly, spindly legs.

Slowly, she walked. One step at a time, she crossed the distance between her bed and Meril's bed. Strangely, she wasn't out of breath. Her heart didn't seem to bother to pound from the effort.

Picking up the music box, Trelina wound it up. She wanted the tune to comfort Meril. And herself. As the song played, she remembered some of the words. But she wasn't up to thoughtspeak singing.

~_When you walk through a storm, hold your head up high—~

Trelina slowly put the music box down next to Meril's ear and curled up beside him, listening to him breathe.

~_And don't be afraid of the darkâ€¦|_~

Meril's breathing began to slow. Trelina put her arms around him and sighed.

I love you Meril. And I'll keep the promise I made.

~_At the end of the storm is a golden skyâ€¦|_~

She calmly laid her head down on his chest.

~_And the sweet, silver song of a larkâ€¦|_~

Trelina stroked Meril's cheek with her palm and held him close, just to show her love. Her breathing slowed, and she watched as all the stars on the horizon seemed to brighten.

The whole galaxy shone in its splendid glory. And a single star shone like a magic jewel.

Trelina slowly closed her eyes and inhaled slowly. She felt herself drifting towards that star, its glow shining at her through a long tunnel. Boldly, Trelina approached the light, unafraid of the death she knew would bring her peace.

~_Walk onâ€¦|walk on with hope in your heartâ€¦|_~

She squeezed Meril gently one last time. Then she breathed out softly, and quietly died. Her arms went limp and the music box that she'd been holding near Meril's ear slipped from her flaccid, pale hand. It came to rest on its side against the pillow beside Meril's head.

Trelina had kept her silent promise to Meril.

~_And you'll never walk aloneâ€¦|_~

Meril's breathing came to a slow halt. He jerked in a breath, then exhaled.

In his dream, Meril saw that same star as Trelina had. He watched her gallop towards it, motioning him to follow. And he did. Meril ran down a long tunnel after Trelina, and followed her into the light.

Meril jerked in another faint breath and exhaled slowly. It was his last, and he lay still, a still calmness coming over his face.

Slowly, the song from the music box wound down, and the metallic flower stopped moving. It was in full bloom.

~_You'll NEVER walk alone._~

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The End

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End
file.